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Chairman Ehli and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Sylvia Danforth, I am from Miles City and I am testifying as a member of the Lifespan Respite Coalition whose more than 60 members are a diverse group of individuals representing state agencies, not for profit and private providers, caregivers, parents and others interested in improving the quality of life of family caregivers and those who need a break from the demands of caregiving.

In August of 2011, the State Office on Aging in the DPHHS Senior & Long Term Division was awarded a three year federal grant which focused on educating Montana's caregivers and developing the statewide Lifespan Respite Coalition.

The mission of the coalition is to "establish a statewide coordinated system of easily accessible, quality and affordable respite care services for Montana's family caregivers or individuals regardless of special needs." Another 3 year grant funded in 2014 provides funding for caregivers to access respite services and to develop sustainable respite care options for Montana's caregivers.

You have heard a lot of data about the need for caregiving and how more than a hundred thirty nine thousand family caregivers regularly assist loved ones with a broad range of tasks from routine to complex often until the burden of caregiving leads to exhaustion and health problems for the caregivers. If Family caregivers are to continue to assume the responsibility for providing the bulk of intensive and long term care, they must receive support. When asked what kind of help they need, family caregivers frequently say "I need a break". When caregivers get breaks to ensure their own health, they prevent potentially adverse consequences for both their own health and the health of their loved one.

The Lifespan Respite Coalition tag line is "It's OK to need it, it's OK to want it and it's OK to get it" to support caregivers in asking for caregiver support for them to get "relief", to get a break." While respite services are available in Montana through a wide variety of funding sources at the federal, state and local level, there is a consistent message from providers and caregivers that it's not enough and unmet respite needs exist across the age span and consumer population. Funding is a primary gap inhibiting access to Lifespan Respite Services. The siloed nature of program funding makes it challenging to support a Lifespan Respite Model and there is limited funding available to support services outside of categorical and financial eligibility requirements. Our current grant funding allows funds to be spent on respite care and a sliding fee cost share online voucher system is available to Montana caregivers no matter where they live.

The Lifespan Respite Coalition has worked hard to create a statewide infrastructure and to develop resources that promote and provide essential information on Lifespan Respite support services as well as the voucher system for accessing respite funding. However, sustainable funding is essential in assuring that the mission of the program continues when grant funding ends. We all need a break from the constant demands of ongoing care and designated funding for the preventative and cost effective respite services is essential.

Thank You!